

### The Divine Light Show

*“And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was” Matthew 2:9b*

The Christmas music has faded. Perhaps your decorations are packed up and put away too. Christmas has come and gone again and for many that transition happened quickly just a day or two after the 25<sup>th</sup>. However, for the Church, the season of Christmas has lingered on with Christmas hymns and songs still ringing in the ears of its attenders. Now this weekend, as we observe Epiphany, the Church wraps up its Christmas season and moves forward toward the life and ministry of the babe born in Bethlehem. In the spirit of holding on to Christmas just a little longer, I want to highlight one other Christmas reflection that I also believe will serve as a good connection for the Church’s transition into the Epiphany season.

For the last two Christmas’, my family has taken the time to go see the *Fantasy of Lights* display put on by Blue Jacket in Franke Park. In all my years of living in Fort Wayne, I had never made the time to go before and when our family went for the first time a couple of years ago, I was blown away. The two mile stretch of lights was stunning. Seeing different themes in the displays and the numerous community sponsors supporting this event was touching. I found it amazing to see all that could be done with these light displays. Such creativity that captured the spirit of the season while also highlighting a familiar image that connected to the sponsor.

Along with the impressive light displays, this event also has a radio station that you can tune into for Christmas music and narration about the displays and background details to the event. The radio show provides just another layer of intentionality that warms the heart during the Christmas season. While the music is fitting for the journey through the lights, the narration is also very encouraging as you hear Blue Jacket’s mission come to life in the voices of their alumni. Catching just a tiny glimpse of the hope that these alumni have because of their experience with Blue Jacket is very inspiring for this Christmas season too.

If you’ve been to this event, then you know that there are many other details that go into this display. If you’ve not had a chance to check this out, I encourage you to do so once, I don’t think you’ll be disappointed. But before I can move on to making some parallels between this display and Epiphany, there’s one last detail that I have to mention. At the very beginning of the journey, there are signs to remind those driving through the display to dim or turn off their lights. This request is made for the courtesy of everyone experiencing the event, so that the brilliance of the light displays is bolder, clearer and can have a fuller effect without other light distraction. Now, I think we’re ready to consider some connections between this classic Fort Wayne experience and the season of Epiphany that the Church is entering this weekend.

One way we can think of this season of Epiphany in the Church Year is that it is a Divine Light Show. From the visit of the wisemen to the Jesus’ transfiguration, God is displaying His light. And some of you might even remember how Pastor Klausmeier talks about this season emphasizing the light of Christ on display during Epiphany that continues to grow brighter and brighter as we move from His birth to His transfiguration. In Epiphany, the Church is on the journey of this Divine Light Show. And while this journey isn’t marked by a two-mile drive, we do mark this journey from this weekend until Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent on February 14, this year. This trip takes the Church from the baby Jesus to Jesus’ adult ministry and the many wonders and signs He did.

Along this Epiphany path, the Church has its own music and narration that provide the background details to the displays that we witness. Our Bible readings and songs, serve as wonderful commentary for this season, providing heart warming reminders of how God has made Himself known and continues to make Himself known to His people year after year. Most importantly, these readings and

hymns emphasize the mission of God, the mission of Jesus, as He brings all people to Himself through His words and works. In the voices and actions of those whom Jesus' touches and interacts with, we witness the hope that Jesus brings to all these people in need. And the recipients of Jesus' mercy and compassion pack this Epiphany season with awe and inspiration that God, the Creator of all, took on flesh to walk among His creation and care for it.

Now depending on the date of Easter, the season of Epiphany can fluctuate in length. A later Easter, allows for a longer Epiphany season. An earlier Easter, like this year, means a shorter Epiphany season. While this means that there will be fewer weeks for us to consider the many displays of this Epiphany season there is one critical detail that runs throughout the entire journey. For people to truly experience the fullness of Christ's light on display, they have to dim or turn off any other light substitute they might be using. Truly, Christ's light of this Epiphany season exposes the truth that humanity is surrounded by darkness and without real light.

That last statement might need a little more explanation. When it comes to light and darkness in the Church, we're not simply talking about light bulbs. No, rather light and darkness deals more with the absence of sin and the presence of sin. True light can be thought of as the complete absence of sin, that is Jesus, God in the flesh, and true darkness is the presence of sin, that is all of sinful humanity. So, as the Church journeys through Epiphany, the Divine Light Show, the fullness of Jesus' light comes into clearest view when He exposes the darkness of sin and any artificial, idolatrous light is extinguished. Any and all attempts to hold onto the darkness as true light, distracts and detracts from the true light of God on display in Jesus, light that He shines on and through the lives of the people He comes into contact with.

Considering this Epiphany season as the Divine Light Show, sets us up for the ultimate display of brilliance of Jesus' light. What we witness during this Epiphany season foreshadows the culmination of light and darkness displayed on the cross and empty tomb. Throughout the Epiphany season, we hear the stories of Jesus' miracles. As He engages the darkness of a sinful world and sinful people, He takes on all that darkness Himself so that it might be nailed to the cross. Then rising from the tomb, darkness and all its consumers witness that the light of Jesus could never be extinguished but instead He, the true light of the world, has overcome the darkness of sin, death and the devil. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, His light can be shared with all people calling them out of the darkness of their own sin and into His marvelous light now and for all of eternity.

This is where the Divine Light Show is headed. This is what Epiphany is preparing us for. And yet, with this knowledge, we don't rush the journey. Day after day, week after week, we patiently plod along to witness God's illuminated work on full display from the past in our readings and hymns as well as in the present as His light illuminates our own lives for His purpose. Like the wisemen from the east, we come into the humble house of our Savior and King in reverent worship and humility, bowing with all our talents and treasures and laying them before Him to be used for His glory not our own. We rejoice like those travelers from afar as they saw the Star spotlight the baby Jesus, because like that Star, God's Word is also spotlighting God's presence among us as well. His Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path anchoring us in His incarnate gifts of Word and Sacrament.

Yes, the Christmas music has faded and now even in the Church this will begin to ring true too. Not only will your personal decorations be all packed up, but soon so will all the Christmas decorations at Emmanuel as well. But don't be fooled, things aren't simply over until the next holiday for the Church. Epiphany has begun, the Divine Light Show is underway! So, come and witness the light of Christ dispel the darkness of sin in your life and mine and be amazed as He not only shines His light into our lives but through lives as well for His glory and praise. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan